

Kaithi

Kaithi, also called "Kayathi" or "Kayasthi", is a historical script used widely in parts of northern India, primarily in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. It was used for writing legal, administrative, and private records.^[1]

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Etymology

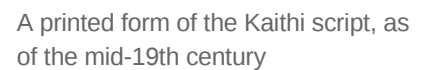
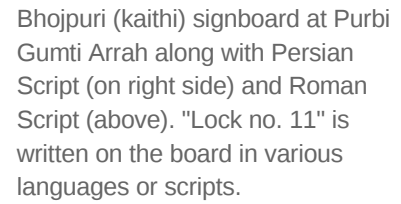
Kaithi script derives its name from the word Kayastha, a social group of India that traditionally consists of administrators and accountants.^[2] The Kayastha community was closely associated with the princely courts and colonial governments of North India, and were employed by them to write and maintain records of revenue transactions, legal documents, and title deeds; general correspondence; and proceedings of the royal courts and related bodies.^[3] The script used by them acquired the name Kaithi.

History

Documents in Kaithi are traceable to at least the 16th century. The script was widely used during the Mughal period. In the 1880s, during the British Raj, the script was recognised as the official script of the law courts of Bihar. Kaithi was the most widely used script of North India west of Bengal. In 1854, 77,368 school primers were in Kaithi script, as compared to 25,151 in Devanagari and 24,302 in Mahajani.^[4] Among the three scripts widely used in the 'Hindi Belt', Kaithi was widely perceived to be neutral, as it was used by both Hindus and Muslims alike for day-to-day correspondence, financial, and administrative activities, while Devanagari was used by Hindus and Persian script by Muslims for religious literature and education. This made Kaithi increasingly unfavorable to the more conservative and religiously inclined members of society who insisted on Devanagari-based and Persian-based transcription of Hindi dialects. As a result of their influence and due to the wide availability of Devanagari type as opposed to the incredibly large variability of Kaithi, Devanagari was promoted, particularly in the Northwest Provinces, which covers present-day Uttar Pradesh.^[5] Kaithi was also nicknamed "Shikasta Nagari" by analogy with Shikasta Nastaliq, because the relationship of Kaithi to Devanagari was perceived as akin to the relationship between the widely used dot-less Shikasta Nastaliq of the time and the more formal printed Nastaliq scripts, which used dotted letters and fuller, less abbreviated letter forms.

Kaithī <div>Kayathi, Kayasthi , कैथी</div>	
 <div>II. AS COMMONLY WRITTEN, the letters being suspended from a continuous top-line. <div> <div>CONSONANTS.</div> <div> <div>व</div> <div>ख</div> <div>ग</div> <div>घ</div> <div>ङ</div> <div>च</div> <div>छ</div> <div>ज</div> <div>झ</div> <div>ञ</div> </div> </div> <div> <div>VOWELS.</div> <div> <div>अ</div> <div>इ</div> <div>उ</div> <div>ए</div> <div>ऐ</div> <div>ओ</div> <div>अं</div> <div>अः</div> <div>इं</div> <div>इः</div> <div>उं</div> <div>उः</div> <div>एं</div> <div>एः</div> <div>ओं</div> <div>ओः</div> </div> </div> </div>	
Type	<p>Abugida</p>
Languages	<p>Angika, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Hindustani, Magahi, Maithili, Nagpuri</p>
Time period	<p>c. 16th–mid 20th century</p>
Parent systems	<div>Brahmi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gupta<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nāgarī<ul style="list-style-type: none">Kaithī </div>
Sister systems	<p>Devanagari, Nandinagari, Sylheti Nagari, Gujarati</p>
Direction	<p>Left-to-right</p>
ISO 15924	<p>Kthi, 317</p>
Unicode alias	<p>Kaithi</p>
Unicode range	<p>U+11080–U+110CF (https://www.unicode.org/charts/PDF/U11080.pdf)</p>

All Kaithi consonants have an inherent *a* vowel:



	VOICELESS PLOSIVES					VOICED PLOSIVES					NASALS		
	<i>Unaspirated</i>			<i>Aspirated</i>		<i>Unaspirated</i>			<i>Aspirated</i>				
	Letter	Trans.	IPA	Letter	Trans.	Letter	Trans.	IPA	Letter	Trans.	Letter	Trans.	IPA
Velar	𑌕	k	/k/	𑌖	kh	𑌗	g	/g/	𑌘	gh	𑌙	ṅ	/ŋ/
Palatal	𑌚	c	/c/	𑌛	ch	𑌜	j	/j/	𑌝	jh	𑌞	ñ	/ɲ/
Retroflex	𑌟	ɖ	/ɖ/	𑌠	ɖʰ	𑌡	ɗ	/ɖ/	𑌢	ɗh	𑌣	ṇ	/ɳ/
						𑌤	ɖ̪	/ɖ̪/	𑌥	ɖ̪ʰ			
Dental	𑌧	t	/t/	𑌨	th	𑌩	d	/d/	𑌪	dh	𑌫	n	/n/
Labial	𑌭	p	/p/	𑌮	ph	𑌯	b	/b/	𑌰	bh	𑌱	m	/m/

	<i>Palatal</i>			<i>Retroflex</i>			<i>Dental</i>			<i>Labial</i>		
	Letter	Trans.	IPA	Letter	Trans.	IPA	Letter	Trans.	IPA	Letter	Trans.	IPA
Sonorants	ਯ	y	/j/	ṛ	r	/r/	ḏ	l	/l/	ਢ	v	/ʋ/
Sibilants	ਸ਼	ś	/ɕ/	ṣ	ṣ	/ʂ/	ੜ	s	/s/			
	<i>Other</i>											
	ਹ	h	/h/									

Vowels

Kaithi vowels have independent (initial) and dependent (diacritic) forms:

Vowels								
	Trans.	Letter	Diacritic	Shown with k	Trans.	Letter	Diacritic	Shown with k
Guttural	a	𑖀		𑖁	ā	𑖀𑖅	𑖅	𑖁𑖅
Palatal	i	𑖂		𑖃	ī	𑖂𑖅	𑖅	𑖃𑖅
Rounded	u	𑖄	𑖆	𑖅	ū	𑖄𑖅	𑖆	𑖅𑖆
Palatoguttural	e	𑖇	𑖈	𑖉	ai	𑖇𑖅	𑖈	𑖉𑖅
Labio-guttural	o	𑖊	𑖋	𑖌	au	𑖊𑖅	𑖋	𑖌𑖅

Diacritics

Several diacritics are employed to change the meaning of letters:

Diacritic	Name	Function
𑖆	candrabindu	A candrabindu denotes nasalisation although it is not normally used with Kaithi. ^[3]
𑖅	anusvara	An anusvara in Kaithi represents true vowel nasalisation. ^[3] For example, 𑖁𑖅, <i>kaṇ</i> .
𑖅	visarga	Visarga is a Sanskrit holdover originally representing /h/. For example, 𑖁𑖅, <i>kaḥ</i> . ^[3]
𑖈	virama	A virama removes a consonant's inherent a and in some cases forms consonant clusters. Compare 𑖂𑖅 <i>maba</i> with 𑖂𑖅 <i>mba</i> . ^[6]
𑖅	nuqta	A nuqta is used to extend letters to represent non-native sounds. For example, 𑖀𑖅 <i>ja</i> + nuqta = 𑖀𑖅, which represents Arabic zayin. ^[3]

Punctuation

Kaithi has several script-specific punctuation marks:

See also

- Devanagari
- Sylheti Nagari
- Gujarati script

References

1. King, Christopher R. 1995. *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. Grierson, George A. 1899. *A Handbook to the Kaithi Character*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co.
3. Pandey, Anshuman (6 May 2008). "L2/08-194: Proposal to Encode the Kaithi Script in ISO/IEC 10646" (<https://www.unicode.org/L2/L2008/08194-n3389-kaithi.pdf>) (PDF).
4. Rai, Alok. "Hindi Nationalism", p. 13
5. General Report on Public Instruction in the Bengal Presidency, p. 103.
6. "The Unicode Standard, Chapter 15.2: Kaithi" (<https://www.unicode.org/versions/Unicode12.0.0/ch15.pdf#G69704>) (PDF). Unicode Consortium. March 2019.

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